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## THE ORIGINAL AUTOMOBILE.

### Recollections of the First Automobile in Springfield, Ill., Over Seventy Years Ago.

GAIUS PADDOCK.

Of the many enterprises that appealed to the citizens of the Capitol none interested them more than that of transportation with modes of rapid travel to and from the city. Railroad travel by steam power had been abandoned, mule power had been tried and proved to be very unsatisfactory and when General James Semple brought to their notice his Prairie Car it was thought by quite a number the problem had been solved for carrying passengers with baggage and light freight.

I cannot fix the exact date, but it was about 1846. The car was built in Springfield and attracted much attention. As I remember it was about 40 feet long and 20 feet wide not a very heavy structure, but strong enough to accommodate fifty passengers and sustain the weight of a steam engine in the center which applied its power to the two head wheels that were about six feet wide, made of iron and wood and nearly six feet high. The front two wheels were on a pivoted axle which was guided by hand levers that turned and directed the course of the car. In the center was a tall mast over 40 feet high with large canvas sail which was to be used as an additional propelling power and add speed to the car when the wind was favorable.

After the completion of the car and it was ready for a trial trip it looked like a general holiday had been given for a large crowd assembled south of the city to witness its departure. At that time the vast prairies were but little settled except the portions bordering the timber near the creeks, where the early settlers located their homes, which left open a wide expanse for grazing and the unsettled section.

The route chosen for the trip was to go southwest around the head of Spring Creek then southeast around the head of Sugar Creek and south to Carlinville, a distance of about 40 miles south of Springfield, thence east heading the Macoupin to Alton (via Brighton) which was the terminus of the route

and home of General Semple, who was quite prominent in the State in many ways. While many doubted the success of the enterprise and new mode of travel they were quite willing to enjoy the outing of any kind, as amusements were few and novelty induced many to take the trip at the appointed time many more got aboard than it was possible to carry. Both upper and lower decks were crowded with men, women and children. They had to be unloaded, drawing lots as to what number and who should go. They were all in good spirits and felt exceedingly jolly over the prospects of a good time ahead. When the cry was given, "All aboard!" "Ship ahoy!" the car moved off with loud cheers and disappeared slowly in the distance.

But like all new enterprises, it had its mishaps and disappointments. After going about eight miles the machinery broke down and a heavy shower came up unexpectedly, and the trip for the present was abandoned. The passengers had kept up their spirits, which they carried with provisions for the trip. All were much disappointed at the results, but were not disheartened or their ardor dampened, as they tramped back to their homes, wet, muddy and exhausted. The car remained where it stopped, the enterprise was abandoned, and the inventor, promoter and largest owner, General Semple, was much disgusted and took his disappointment philosophically, but condemned the elements, the builders and other obstructions with the failure, and at the same time the citizens who were indifferent as to the success of this enterprise. Though it was premature, being about sixty years in advance of the times, it was undoubtedly the first attempt to travel by power over the land.